

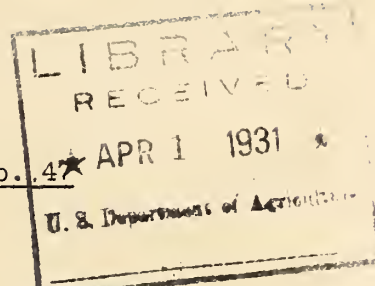
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SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLY -- No. 4

March 23, 1931



A series of radio talks by W. R. M. Wharton, chief of the Eastern district, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered Monday mornings at 10 A.M., Eastern Time, through WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company Stations.

Good morning, my radio friends, your representative of the Federal Food and Drug Administration comes to you this morning for the forty-seventh time to tell you how your foods and drugs are safeguarded by the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act, and to tell you how to read labels, in order that you may become careful, exacting, discriminating, and economical buyers.

My friends, my story today involves a mistake, a rather serious mistake, which was made by an employee of a large wholesale drug house. This concern bought certain products in bulk and repacked these in retail packages. Now, practically all concerns which carry on this kind of business do it in a systematic way and have very strict rules so as to prevent any mistakes. But the wholesale druggist I have in mind bought sodium bicarbonate in barrels and filled packages therefrom---labeled the small packages, "Sodium Bicarbonate" and, in this case sold them to the U. S. Veterans' Bureau. The product was examined by the Veterans' Bureau and found to contain varying amounts of sodium fluoride in quantity from 86 to 92 per cent. An investigation was begun by the Food and Drugs Administration, the consignment was seized and the shipper was prosecuted and fined and the goods destroyed. Sodium fluoride is decidedly poisonous and would have caused many deaths if this product had been used as sodium bicarbonate is used, internally. It is, my friends, by action such as this that the Federal Food and Drug officials protect your food and drug supply.

I told you in my read-the-label talk on 'the family medicine cabinet' a few weeks ago that I would take up laxative, purgative and drastic cathartics, separately at a later date---so my read-the-label subject today is laxative, purgative and drastic cathartics. Perhaps in no other country in the world are laxatives so extensively used as in the United States. If one is to judge by the quantities of cathartics sold, their use by the people of the United States indicates a considerable degree of habituation and an alarming amount of indiscriminate use. Among the reasons for this situation may be: sedentary occupations, improper diet, rush and hurry, ease of procurement, lack of appreciation of the danger incident to the indiscriminate use of cathartics, and artificial demand created by lurid advertisements.

It is high time in your speaker's opinion that the public be told the truth about cathartics. It is high time for the public to know that cathartics are not only habit-producing drugs, but that in certain conditions they are contraindicated and dangerous. It is high time for the public to know that the various products indiscriminately sold for cathartic purposes fall in different classes, producing their results because of different reasons, according to their composition. It is high time for the public to know that one cathartic may be less suited to an individual's needs than another, and some may not be

suitable at all.

The intensity of effect of cathartics varies from mild to extreme. Small quantities of one cathartic will produce effects as extreme as large quantities of others. Generally, but not always, increased doses increase the intensity of results and effects differ with different individuals. For these reasons, it is extremely important that you know the nature of the drugs you are taking and that you read and follow directions on labels.

The list of drugs, chemicals, and other agents used for cathartic purposes is quite long. A laxative is a mildly acting cathartic.

Cathartic constituents may be divided into six classes which we will call: (1) Oils, (2) Coal-tar preparations, (3) Bulk-formers, (4) Salts, (5) Vegetable Drugs, (6) Mercurials.

Among the oils used for cathartic purposes are: (1) Olive oil U.S.P., (2) Mineral oil U.S.P., (3) Castor Oil U.S.P., (4) Croton oil U.S.P.

The coal tar preparations include phenolphthalein U.S.P.

The bulk-formers are bran, agar U.S.P., and psyllium seed.

The salts include Epsom salt or magnesium sulphate U.S.P., Rochelle salt, or Potassium and sodium tartrate U.S.P., Glauber salt or sodium sulphate U.S.P., sodium phosphate U.S.P., and potassium bi-tartrate U.S.P. or cream of tartar.

The vegetable cathartic drugs include senna, rhubarb, aloe, cascara sagrada, podophyllum and colocynth, all U.S.P.

Among the mercurials are, calomel U.S.P., blue mass U.S.P., and gray powder U.S.P.

In the case of the oils, the effects differ. Castor oil is a simple purgative. Croton oil is a very drastic and dangerous cathartic and should never be used except on a doctor's prescription. Mineral oil is not absorbed and acts to soften and lubricate the feces. Olive oil, in so far as it escapes digestion and absorption, acts in the same manner.

The bulk-formers are somewhat demulcent. They are sometimes dangerous to children and to some adults, causing excessive intestinal irritation, and should not be used in cases of intestinal irritation or stoppage.

The salts have cathartic effect because they interfere with water absorption. Like other cathartics, the salts should not be used in cases of intestinal abnormalities and inflammations.

The vegetable cathartic drugs generally produce their results by stimulating peristalsis through irritation. Some of them are powerful irritants, especially cathartic resins, such as jalap, colocynth, podophyllum and elaterin. The emodin bearing drugs, such as aloes, cascara and senna, are the most commonly used and are milder irritants.

The mercurials act by irritation, exciting peristalsis and lessening fluid absorption. They are subtle poisons and dangerous because they may be changed in composition and absorbed by the intestine.

Mr friends, all of the cathartics are habit-producing, and should only be used in cases of temporary constipation and not where inflammation or other organic trouble is present, when your physician should be consulted.

All of the substances named are freely available as such, in various combinations with each other, and with other substances used to disguise their taste, to change their form, and to produce other physiological effects. The result is various combinations of salts, dry^{and} liquid. The result -- vegetable laxative preparations, powders, extracts, sirups, tablets and pills. The result -- a host of lars', 'oids, 'lets and the like, used as parts of coined trademark names. The result -- hundreds of different, alleged liver pills, biliousness cures, and anti-antointoxication and anti-constipation remedies. The result -- scores of natural, reinforced, and concentrated mineral waters. The final result -- a Nation of laxative takers, including many who are slaves to the cathartic habit.

When you buy any of the cathartics, or preparations thereof, which are described in the United States Pharmacopoeia or National Formulary, if the labels have the official names, with or without the letters, U.S.P. or N.F., you may learn their composition by consulting your druggists' copy of these books. Therefore read labels.

The Federal food and drugs act does not require drugs to be labeled to show their common name nor does it require declaration of any of the ingredients commonly used for laxative purposes, but when the manufacturer chooses to declare the composition or formula of a product, then such statements are required by the law to be true to fact.

You can learn a lot about composition by reading labels. For example, a label may say that the product contains no minerals or mercury compounds. All right, now you know that the laxative is not salts or calomel. A product may be labeled as "purely vegetable". This you may conclude contains no phenolphthlein, calomel, or salts.

But do not understand the declarations, "purely vegetable", "contains no minerals", to represent an especially desirable product for you. Cascara sagrada occasionally fails to act and aloe is unsuited to some patients. Colocynth gripes unmercifully.

My friends, mineral waters have been exploited as nature's laxative for many generations. All laxative mineral waters owe their laxative effects to one or more of the salts I have named. Many of the mineral waters, as they occur in springs, are too weak in dissolved salts to prove satisfactory for laxative purposes. Consequently, the majority of them are either concentrated by evaporation, or fortified with some one or more of the salts themselves. Read labels and you will find out whether the product you buy is "concentrated" or "fortified". Many of the spring-water salts in dry form are fortified with salts, as the label will tell you.

Read labels on laxative spring waters and on spring-water salts for chemical analysis statements. Often long lists of various ingredient proportions will be stated, but you will find that the ingredients contained in significant amounts are among the laxative salts I named earlier in this talk. To illustrate, a label may list half a dozen or more mineral salts. Close examination of the labels will show very large amounts of salts that have laxative effect and only small amounts of other mineral salts. These waters depend in part on encouraging the drinking of more water.

There is another class of preparation, well known generally by the names of the originators or source of the formulae, such as Janeway's Pills, Gregory's powders, St. Germain Tea, and Hinckle's pills. These are not patent medicines. They are names which have come to be applied generally to standard preparations. You will encounter these names and you should know what they mean. Janeway's pills contain aloe, podophyllum, belladonna, and nux vomica. Gregory's powder is composed of rhubarb, magnesium oxide, and ginger. St. Germain Tea is composed of senna, sambucus, potassium bitartrate, and aromatics. Hinckle's Pills contain cascarn, aloin, podophyllum, belladonna, strychnine, and ginger.

Certain combinations of the laxatives are sold as liver medicines. Others are sold as cures for constipation. Officials enforcing the Federal food and drugs act here proceeded against a great many such laxatives, misbranded with false, fraudulent claims of curative value. Hear what Dr. J. J. Durrett, who is the Food and Drug Administration's chief medical expert and a health authority of national reputation, says about the curative effects of laxatives and laxative preparations --

"The liver has nothing whatever to do with constipation except that the bile probably helps to keep the intestinal content more fluid. Therefore, any promise of cure of liver disease by laxatives is improper and untrue." He says, further, that a person cannot get rid of chronic constipation simply by taking a laxative as he does not know of any drug cure for that disease as such. Constipation has its origin in a great many conditions and there is no medicine or group of medicines which will furnish a remedy. Likewise, Dr. Durrett says: "The claim that laxatives will eliminate waste materials or poison from the body is a false statement because laxatives do not accomplish that purpose. They eliminate waste from the lower intestines only".

Sometimes laxative drugs are mixed with other ingredients and sold for tonic purposes. Dr. Durrett says that, "laxatives and tonic drugs do not go together, since tonics are supposed to be taken over considerable periods and if they contain laxatives, they are apt to produce the laxative habit".

Folks, I have told you that a great many laxative preparations are sold under coined or fanciful names. This for the purpose of giving proprietorship and commercial reward for exploitation, with financial gain to the proprietors, and the proprietors go to great lengths to get the public to buy their products. It is regrettable that these appeals are so largely made for children's use. Experts say that children with a proper diet and exercise should not need laxatives. To illustrate the advertising appeals to secure the use of laxatives by children, we see a picture of a child saying, "Mother always gives me Blank's pills", and we see the two picture series: one shows a child scared at the sight of a bottle and a spoon, the second shows a child gleefully grasping for what looks and tastes like chewing gum but which has phenolphthalein incorporated. These are generally prepared in

Read the labels and you will find such statements as, "a medicine not a confection". Now, the Federal food and drugs act prohibits the inclusion of any dangerous ingredients in confections. Hence, the manufacturer takes his medicated product out of the confectionery class by calling it what it is -- a drug or a medicine.

Appeals are made in advertising and in circulars for the free and continued use of the various laxatives, in such terms as: "get up in the morning feeling bright and snappy" -- "pleasant to take" -- "constipation is the forerunner of nearly all diseases" -- "a natural cathartic" -- "safe and sure" -- "no change of diet or habits necessary" -- "a mild natural laxative" -- "do you know how constipation and many more serious ills may be prevented?" -- "health-giving orders" -- "no bad after-effects" -- "purifies and cools the blood" -- "cleans the system of accumulated impurities" -- "imparts vigor" -- "leading doctors indorse it" -- "pleasant, cooling, invigorating" -- "health-giving" -- "assists nature" -- "smart mothers give their children" -- "is widely used with good results". The Federal food and drugs act limits the statements on labels and circulars accompanying the product in interstate commerce, but does not limit the advertising in newspapers and periodicals. The act has no control over outside advertising.

When you see such appeals as these, discount them very materially. They are the sales talk of people who have something to sell you. Appeals, based on alleged curative values, are made, such as: "unrivalled for constipation, and resulting ailments such as headaches, biliousness, indigestion, sour stomach, bad breath" -- "recommended for habitual constipation" -- "invaluable adjunct in obesity, gout and rheumatism" -- "neutralizes the acid of stomach and expels gas", and many more. Laxatives evacuate the bowels -- they do very little more than this.

My friends, I am continuing to urge you to read labels with all the seriousness I can command. You must have recognized the advantage, satisfaction, and economy which result from becoming careful, and intelligent label readers. You should by all means have copies of all my read-the-label talks. Copies of my talk today, and those which have preceded it, will be sent you for the asking.

Write to W.R.W. WHARTON, United States Department of Agriculture, 201 Varick Street, New York City.

